



November 17, 2014

Bruce Bolding
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

Dear Bruce,

The Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club is a service organization based in Spokane and maintains a membership of over 125 members working to keep our fisheries viable. We have a number of members who spend a great deal of the fall season fishing the Grande Ronde River. We agree with the effort to preserve the integrity of the wild steelhead, but urge the WDFW to refrain from opening up the lower 2.5 miles of the river to the harvesting of hatchery steelhead.

Currently this section of river is under a selective gear restriction (artificial single barbless hook) with no retention of either wild or hatchery steelhead. The proposed changes would allow voluntary retention of up to 3 hatchery steelhead in this section of the river. The change has been promoted as an avenue to address the issue of reducing the number of hatchery steelhead in the system which potentially could compete or spawn with wild steelhead.

The Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club opposes this change as the fishing pressure on the lower 2.5 miles of this system would be increased dramatically if harvest was allowed. Currently there are two distinct groups of fishers that utilize this resource, fly fishermen and spin gear fishermen. These two styles are completely distinct and in most situations incompatible with one another. Under the current regulations retention of hatchery steelhead is allowed in the Snake River and the gear fishermen tend to do most of their fishing where they can harvest fish. The section known as Heller's Bar has become more popular and as it has it has become virtually impossible for fly fishers to enjoy because of the incompatibility of the two fishing styles. Spin gear fishermen tend to occupy one given spot and cast over the same water time and time again, while fly fishermen step through a run so others can enjoy the experience. As more spin fishermen gather, the river becomes impossible for fly fishers to utilize the same resource. One of our members was recently at Heller's Bar and indicated that by 7:30AM the section had over 40 spin gear fisherman utilizing the resource. He sat there for two hours and was unable to fish any section of the Bar as no one moved or left during the time he was there. This is not an uncommon occurrence during the peak months of Sept/Oct/Nov.

Leaving the regulations in place for this one 2.5 mile stretch will have little impact on the wild steelhead issue, as this stretch comprises less than 1% of the Southeastern Washington miles of steelhead rivers, but will allow a great resource to be properly utilized. This stretch of water has become a prime destination for local fly fishermen as well as those from out of state, which has a significant financial impact on the local economy. Further pressure on this resource could diminish the "quality experience" and possibly reduce the usage by out of state visitors. We do not want to see a great resource destroyed and urge you to allow this small, but significant portion of the Grande Ronde River to remain as a quality fishery.

Respectfully submitted,

Lee Funkhouser
President
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